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090819Z Jul 04

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 001139

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GABORONE FOR THOMAS, BROWN
ROME FOR FODAG FOR LAVELLE, DAVIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: HOLDING ZIMBABWE ACCOUNTABLE FOR FOOD

REF: (A) HARARE 00768; (B) HARARE 00944

Summary and Action Request

1.The Food and Agriculture Organization/Rome (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) recently released a special report on Zimbabwe, dated 5 July 2004. This report estimates the country's cereal production for the 2003-2004 agricultural year to be about 950,000 metric tons (MT), compared to a need of around 1.9 million MT for human consumption. This special report was issued by the FAO, without concurrence of the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ), because the GOZ canceled a joint crop and food supply assessment mission (CFSAM) in May, which was expected to provide the most authoritative estimates of the country's grain harvest (Reftel A). FAO's estimate of Zimbabwe's grain harvest is roughly consistent with other independent estimates, but significantly lower than the GOZ's claimed bumper harvest. The GOZ continues to use the claimed bumper harvest as justification for its insistence that Zimbabwe neither wants nor needs significant amounts of international food assistance (except for small, targeted programs), which would give the GOZ nearly total control of food stocks in the period leading up to the scheduled March 2005 Parliamentary elections.

2.FAO's special report and other independent assessments make a credible case that this year's cereal deficit will be roughly as large as last year's, during which the international community operated a large food distribution program. Given the lack of transparency and information-sharing by the GOZ, it is unclear to what extent the GOZ will be able to import significant amounts of grain to close the country's cereal gap, although the FAO report estimates that the GOZ could import as much as 620,000 MT, leaving a cereal deficit of around 320,000 MT. The Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVac) is also expected on Monday to release its vulnerability assessment report, which we have been informed will estimate that 2.3 million Zimbabweans are food insecure (See Septel). Given this continuing uncertainty and the likely precarious situation of Zimbabwe's vulnerable population, the international community should question both the ability of the country to import sufficient food, and the GOZ's intentions for procuring and distributing food. Action Request: We recommend that the US work with the United Nations (UN) and with other United Nations Security Council (UNSC) members to orchestrate a UNSC session in which the FAO is called upon to outline the unfolding food situation in Zimbabwe and GOZ would be asked to respond. End Summary.

CEREAL PRODUCTION IN ZIMBABWE FOR 2004-5

3.The (GOZ) officially proclaimed a "bumper" harvest this year with maize production of about 2.4 million MT and total grain production of 2.8 million MT (Reftel B). But other reports, including those by independent experts, FAO, and FEWSNET, refute those figures. Most estimate less than half of what the GOZ claims, and all predict a food deficit.

4.The most comprehensive crop and livestock assessment in Zimbabwe is usually carried out by the GOZ, FAO and WFP together, an exercise referred to

as the Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission (CFSAM). The 2004 CFSAM to Zimbabwe was curtailed by the abrupt and unexplained GOZ withdrawal of participating staff (Reftel A). As a result, the FAO and WFP teams visited only three of the country's eight provinces. Based on this limited field work, and supplemented by information from a number of sources, including GOZ statistics, rainfall data, satellite imagery and discussions with experts during and after the CFSAM, FAO/Rome recently issued a special report on Zimbabwe estimating the country's cereal production.

5.The following summarizes the 2003-4 agricultural season production estimates for Zimbabwe by various entities/sources:

- GOZ: Maize production 2,431,182 MT, other cereals 374,813 MT, total cereal production 2,805,995 MT.

- FEWSNET: Maize production 1,400,000 MT, other cereals 260,000 MT, total cereal production 1,660,000 million MT.

- Zim Consult: Maize production 650-850,000 MT, other cereals 100-200,000 MT, total cereal production 750,000-1,050,000 MT.

- FAO Rome, Crop and Food Supply Assessment Mission: Maize production 708,073 MT, other cereals 243,341 MT, total cereal production 951,414 MT.

- Food Security Brief, March 2004 (FAO, WFP, FEWSNET, UNDP): Maize production 800,000-1,200,000 MT, other cereals 200,000 MT, total cereal production 1.1-1.3 million MT.

----- CEREAL REQUIREMENTS IN ZIMBABWE -----

6.Estimated cereal requirements for human consumption in Zimbabwe for 2004-5, according to the FAO/Rome report released this week, are about 1.94 million MT (based on 2002 census, as amended, and 163 kg cereals per person/yr). Thus, for human consumption alone, nearly 1.3 million tons would need to be imported to meet the deficit.

7.The quantity of cereals to be used for animal feed is likely to be lower than last year, due to high cost, grain shortages, and reduced numbers of animals. FAO/Rome estimates a requirement of 125,000 MT for animal feed.

----- IMPORT REQUIREMENTS -----

8.A cereal balance sheet is used to predict the supply and demand for cereals within a country, providing a basis for calculating importation requirements. In Zimbabwe, the completion of a balance sheet is severely hampered by the GOZ's lack of transparency and withholding of information. The GOZ refuses to share with donors any information on the domestic availability of food stocks, including the amounts stored and location, planned food procurement or import figures.

9.Using various calculations and assumptions regarding stocks held by the GOZ, FAO/Rome estimates a total import requirement for Zimbabwe of 1,290,286 MT cereals for 2004-5 (995,927 MT of maize, 9,359 MT sorghum, 276,100 MT wheat and 8,900 MT rice). World Food Program reportedly has 60,000 MT cereals pledged and available within the country, which lessens the import requirement to 1,230,286 MT.

10.Whether the GOZ will be able to import enough food to feed the population remains to be seen. It is feasible, however, for the country to meet this import requirement, in light of the good maize production in neighboring Zambia and Mozambique this year, especially if the GOZ eases restrictions on private sector maize import. Increased cotton production, higher tobacco prices, and the Reserve Bank's improved capturing of foreign remittances, among other things, have improved the country's foreign exchange situation somewhat over last year. FAO estimates that the GOZ has already contracted to import 220,000 MT of maize, and has the ability to

import an additional 400,000 MT (for a total import capacity of around 620,000 MT). If this is correct, the country would still have a deficit of 325,286 MT of cereals.

FEARS ABOUT GOZ POLITICIZATION OF FOOD

11. Even if Zimbabwe is able to import the total 1.2 million MT of cereals needed to meet the estimated deficit, politicization of food remains a serious concern. Now that imports of international food have been stopped, the GOZ will be in total control of food distributions within Zimbabwe, and will be able to decide who does and does not receive food. Given widespread, credible reports of GOZ partisan food distribution in the past, most donors fear that the GOZ would use political criteria for food distribution rather than basing food aid on vulnerability criteria. This may forecast very hard times ahead for those perceived by the GOZ to be opposition supporters.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

12. The FAO/Rome and other reports make a credible case that this year's cereal deficit will be roughly as large as last year's (during which the international community operated a large food distribution program), despite the GOZ allegations of a "bumper" harvest. Due to the lack of transparency and information-sharing by the GOZ, it remains unclear to what extent the GOZ will be able to import significant amounts of grain to close the country's cereal gap. Given this continuing uncertainty and the likely precarious situation of Zimbabwe's vulnerable population, the international community should question both the ability of the country to import sufficient food, and the GOZ's intentions for procuring and distributing food. UN offices in Zimbabwe have so far been unable to promote the necessary dialogue needed to address the food security situation.

13. We recommend that the US work with the UN and with other United Nations Security Council (UNSC) members to orchestrate a UNSC session in which FAO is called upon to outline the likely food situation in Zimbabwe and GOZ would be asked to respond. The UN Resident Representative has told us privately that a UNSC session on the Zimbabwe food situation would be appropriate and useful.

14. In the best of circumstances, such a session
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could force the GOZ to acknowledge its excessive optimism, perhaps provide facts on its import intentions, and acknowledge its needs so that donors could assist the most vulnerable, as well as gain some pledges based on GOZ readiness to coordinate its food programs with the UN. In the worst case, the UNSC could reach a conclusion that GOZ is neglecting the needs of its people and bears responsibility for any resultant food crisis.

SULLIVAN